

Rancho Bernardo Journal

October 20, 2005

City eyes reclaimed water uses

By **Andrew Good**

San Diego water department officials are investigating the possibility of bringing reclaimed water to homes for landscape use in an effort to create a more self-reliant water supply.

Using recycled water for landscape watering could lower residents' water bills and help establish a more self-reliant water supply, officials say.

The study is being conducted as officials grapple with an increasing population that will require 25 percent more water by 2030.

Currently, about 85 percent of San Diego's water comes from northern California or the Colorado River.

According to city officials directing the study, reclaimed water use saves enough potable water for 40,000 families a year.

By shifting to a self-reliant supply, prices will drop and natural wetland preserves will be better protected, said Ron Coss, the water department's technical manager.

Reclaimed water — different from gray water, which is recycled within a property's grounds, rather than at a plant — is used primarily for landscape and crop irrigation.

California law requires the water be purified to a safe drinking level if directed for home use, though it isn't meant to replace potable water, Coss explained.

He added that when reclaimed water is purified, there's little difference between the two.

"If you held a glass of reclaimed water and a glass of ordinary drinking water up to one another, you wouldn't be able to see a difference," Coss said, adding the primary difference is a higher level of chlorine in the reclaimed water.

San Diego has two major reclaimed water plants — North City and South Bay — which are currently being under-utilized, Coss said. Twice as much reclaimed water is used during the summer, leaving the facilities under-used during colder seasons.

In order to increase usage of both facilities, the study encourages residential developments to be dual-plumbed for both reclaimed and potable water.

The results of the study will begin its ascent through several city committees Nov. 21, when it's reviewed by the Public Utilities Advisory Committee. Coss said it's expected to go before a full council sometime in the spring.